What is claimed is:

1. A method of identifying a T cell receptor (TCR) variable (V) gene expressed by target T cells in an individual, comprising:

a) determining expression of one or more TCR V genes by activated T cells from said individual; and

b) determining regulatory activity elicited in response to one or more TCR V peptides by T cells from said individual;

wherein a TCR V gene that is preferentially expressed in step a), whose corresponding TCR V peptide elicits low T cell regulatory activity in step b), is identified as a V gene expressed by target T cells.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said individual has an autoimmune disease.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein said autoimmune disease is multiple sclerosis.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein expression of said one or more TCR V genes is determined by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR).

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said one or more TCR V genes are V beta genes.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said activated T cells are characterized as CD25+CD4+ T cells.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein said activated T cells are further characterized as CD45RO+ or CD45RA- T cells.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein preferential expression of a TCR V gene is indicated by at least a 50% higher expression of said V gene in activated T cells than in unselected T cells.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein said regulatory activity is secretion of an anti-inflammatory cytokine.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein said anti-inflammatory cytokine is IL-10.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein secretion of said cytokine is determined by an immunospot assay.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein said one or more TCR V peptides are V beta peptides.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein said one or more TCR V peptides are CDR2 peptides.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein said low regulatory T cell activity in step b) is indicated by at least a 50% reduction in regulatory activity compared to a normal value.

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15. A method of monitoring the efficacy of a therapy for an autoimmune disease, comprising:

a) identifying a TCR V gene expressed by target T cells in an individual with an autoimmune disease by the method of claim 1; and

b) determining T cell regulatory activity elicited in response to the corresponding TCR V peptide after initiation of therapy.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein said autoimmune disease is multiple sclerosis.

17. The method of claim 15, wherein said therapy selectively targets said T cells that express said TCR V gene.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said therapy is immunization with a peptide corresponding to said TCR V gene.

19. A method of monitoring the efficacy of a therapy for an autoimmune disease, comprising:

a) identifying a TCR V gene expressed by target T cells in an individual with an autoimmune disease by the method of claim 1; and

b) determining expression of said V gene by activated T cells from said individual after initiation of therapy.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein said autoimmune disease is multiple sclerosis.

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21. The method of claim 19, wherein said therapy selectively targets said T cells that express said TCR V gene.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein said therapy is immunization with a peptide corresponding to said TCR V gene.

23. A method of selecting a therapy for an autoimmune disease, comprising:

a) identifying a TCR V gene expressed by target T cells in an individual with an autoimmune disease by the method of claim 1; and

b) selecting a therapy that targets T cells expressing said TCR V gene.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein said autoimmune disease is multiple sclerosis.

25. The method of claim 21, wherein said therapy is immunization with a peptide corresponding to said TCR V gene.

26. A kit, comprising:

a) one or more TCR V peptides; and

b) one or more agents for detecting TCR V gene expression,

wherein said kit components are suitable for use in the method of claim 1.

27. The kit of claim 26, wherein said one or more TCR V peptides are V beta peptides.

28. The kit of claim 26, wherein said one or more TCR V peptides are CDR2 peptides.

29. The kit of claim 26, wherein said one or more agents for detecting TCR V gene expression are PCR primers.

30. The kit of claim 26, wherein said one or more agents for detecting TCR V gene expression are V beta PCR primers.

31. The kit of claim 26, comprising at least 3 TCR V peptides and at least 3 agents for detecting TCR V gene expression.

32. The kit of claim 31, comprising at least 20 TCR V peptides and at least 20 agents for detecting TCR V gene expression.

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